



Town of Greenville

Town of Greenville, Mercer County, PA Economic Development Strategy EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

October 5, 2020

KM Date Community Planning, LLC





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Town of Greenville

The Town of Greenville is a historic town in northwestern Pennsylvania, in the center of Mercer County, with a population of about 5,700 residents. An hour and a half from key population centers of Pittsburgh, Cleveland and Erie, it boasts many assets, making it an ideal visitor destination and place to live and work, including:

- Thiel College, a 4-year historic Lutheran liberal arts institution
- Extensive regional recreation opportunities, including Pymatuning Lake, the canoeable Shenango River leading from the lake to Greenville, a downtown Riverside Park along the river, and surrounding state parks and trails
- A quality historic downtown Main Street, a national historic district with three intact late 19th century blocks of substantial buildings
- A small cluster of local businesses which draw customers from around the region, especially in summer
- An arts/cultural community which supports a symphony, community theater, art gallery, and three historical museums
- A small but thriving industrial sector with micro-clusters in metals, wood products, and health products manufacturing
- A rural environment with natural rolling hills and a growing population of small-scale specialty farms
- A solid, small-town local school district which draws families to Greenville
- A reputation for being a small town community with engaged citizens and leadership
- A thriving local library which is a resource for families, residents and businesses

As a “legacy community” which lost its historic manufacturing base over the last four decades, Greenville has seen its share of disinvestment and population loss. Not everyone has a positive vision for Greenville’s future. Citizens and businesses have made incremental progress over the years with efforts to create recreation opportunities, change negative perceptions, and attract businesses. These important efforts have ebbed and flowed over time, but each movement has accomplished real goals, and established relationships and community connections.

Greenville’s Assets



Figure 1: Around the core four assets, in green and orange, are eight supporting assets which together demonstrate strong opportunity for Greenville.

A Time of Opportunity

Greenville is now at another opportune time to move its vision forward. Significant developments in the past year include:

- The receipt of \$900,000 in US EPA grant funds for brownfields environmental work, which is available for areawide as well as site-level planning
- The long-awaited environmental covenant on the Trinity North Site is just about complete
- The state-authorized ability to create a Redevelopment Authority to manage redevelopment is now available to small communities
- There is a track record of small Pennsylvania communities with vacant industrial property achieving redevelopment success, proving it’s doable to citizens and investors/developers alike

- Penn Northwest, the regional development corporation, will be gaining new leadership, opening the door for new strategies and partnerships
- The cities of Pittsburgh and Cleveland have economic momentum, both acquiring new tech populations with discretionary income and interest in outdoors
- The Millennial and Gen Z generations are starting careers and families, looking for walkable Main Street environments and historic character
- The Boomer generation is retiring, including many Thiel alumni, and are also looking for walkable Main Street environment and historic character, with an interest in the outdoors
- The pandemic has expanded opportunities for “global earners” to live anywhere
- The pandemic is also likely to expand interest in living in less dense rural environments

The Economic Strategy Plan

As Greenville comes toward the exit stage of its Act 47 oversight, it is important to develop economic strategies which the Town leaders, residents, partners, and businesses can take forward to strengthen Greenville’s economic status into the future. Funded by the Act 47 program as a critical part of the Act 47 Exit Strategy, this Economic Strategy responds to opportunities and assets to define action steps which the Town can use to strengthen its economic base.

This economic strategic plan was developed over the past year in collaboration with the Greenville Economic Strategy Committee comprised of sixteen interested citizens, business owners, Town leaders, and county and state technical staff. They offered useful feedback at six meetings during the process, and also held subcommittee meetings of their own. With the publication of this report and implementation strategy, they are poised to take these ideas forward toward a bright future for the Town of Greenville.

Findings of the Market Analysis

A key part of development of this economic strategy was an overview market analysis in several important areas. This analysis identified areas of opportunity and important assets which Greenville can build on in its revitalization efforts.

- **Business Activity:** Findings include micro-clusters in metals, woodworking, miscellaneous manufacturing
- **Growth areas:** Analysis identified small-scale food production and downstream petrochemical products as potential growth areas for Greenville business
- **Retail Market:** Analysis showed significant leakage, especially Main Street type businesses
- **Main Street markets:** Multiple markets served by Main Street were identified, including longtime residents, new residents/globals, visitors, nearby workers, college students and youth/families
- **Housing:** Analysis indicated gaps in upper price point and affordable housing (especially senior-oriented affordable)

- **Strong draws:** Walkability, local schools, small town setting and community, historic character, recreation, arts and hobby are strong draws for small town visitors, businesses and residents
- **Thiel College:** Interviews and analysis indicated that alumni are an enthusiastic untapped market
- **Covid-19 effects:** The pandemic has many unknown impacts to date, but “global earners”, collaborative workspace, and small-town life will likely emerge as stronger markets

Priority Strategies

The Economic Strategy Committee identified three top priority areas for action, with an additional nine recognized as important to begin within the next three years. Each of these strategies has multiple steps that can stretch over ten years, as detailed in the full report. The most effective approach will involve moving forward step-by-step within each organization’s capacity. This is especially important given Covid-19 and the uncertainty of additional tasks that are involved for every organization and family.

These included:

1. **TOP PRIORITY: Redevelop Trinity North.** This is a long-term, likely 10-year plan made possible by the imminent completion of environmental covenants, receipt of the EPA funds which will support planning, and legal authority for Greenville to establish a Redevelopment Authority. With a plan and market studies in place, and a mechanism for redevelopment, a Coalition will be charged to work on acquisition of the property, exploration of covenant changes to allow for a mix of appropriate uses on the site, and redevelopment through public-private partnerships.
2. **TOP PRIORITY: Comprehensive Urban Design Plan, Site Studies and Zoning for Downtown.** A downtown-wide plan, site-specific studies, and necessary zoning updates to allow for redevelopment will be funded by part of the \$600,000 EPA grant to be received in October.
3. **TOP PRIORITY: Prioritize Historic Preservation.** A task force will be created to work on saving critical properties on Main Street, exploring expansion of the existing National Historic District so more property owners can take advantage of tax credits, and working with property owners, the Town, and the public on putting critical protections in place and developing funding sources to maintain Main Street historic character.
4. **Strengthen Main Street.** The Chamber of Commerce will continue to work on a variety of projects including business recruitment, program development, organizational development, marketing, and collaboration with businesses and organizations. Key to this work will be providing funded student internships to help expand the Chamber’s capacity for projects.
5. **Collaborate with Thiel College.** The Town and Thiel College will collaborate on intergenerational programming, arts programming, student involvement on Main Street, and other projects.

- 6. Enhance Recreation Opportunities.** A recreation working group will be re-invigorated to continue to develop expanded recreation opportunities in Greenville, including trail completion, Riverside Park design and redevelopment, business recruitment, and related projects.
- 7. Enhance the Arts and Culture.** The Chamber of Commerce will work with Thiel College, the Greenville Symphony, the Greenville Area Community Theater, local artists, and others to bring more arts activity to Greenville and Main Street.
- 8. Strengthen Greenville's Neighborhoods.** The Town will leverage funds to remove blight, rehabilitate and restore properties, repair streets and sidewalks, assist property owners with repairs, and begin a street tree program.
- 9. Collaborate with Greenville Area Schools.** The Town, Chamber of Commerce, and Thiel College will work together with the schools to jointly market Greenville, and develop intergenerational programming.
- 10. Develop and Market Greenville's Brand.** The Chamber of Commerce will lead a collaborative effort with Thiel College, the Greenville School District, the GAEDC, the GRDC, and others to market and brand Greenville to targeted audiences both local, regional and in Cleveland, Pittsburgh and Erie; and among Thiel College alumni.
- 11. Develop Agricultural, Local Food, and Agritourism Opportunities.** The Chamber of Commerce and GAEDC will work with local farmers and businesses to expand the farmer's market, bring it to Main Street, and develop agritourism programming, and recruit local food producing businesses to Greenville locations.
- 12. Enhance the Business and Commercial Environment.** Greenville's Economic Development organizations, Greenville Area Economic Development Corporation (GAEDC) and the Greenville Reynolds Development Corporation (GRDC), will collaborate with businesses, regional economic development and workforce development agencies to enhance the business environment, recruit businesses, further develop micro-clusters, bring high speed internet costs down, and connect workers and businesses to workforce training opportunities.

The full report includes details characterizing Greenville, market analysis findings, and specific strategies and action steps.